

# Sounds of Freedom and Quiet Honor for Fallen Heroes

by Capt. Christine L. Kunz  
photos by Master Sgt. Jim Varhegyi

**Spence's Bizarre, located near downtown Dover, Del.,** is a popular spot for bargain hunters from nearby Dover Air Force Base. Airmen say it's a great place to go because of the variety of items and the bargain prices. Vendors host new and used goods, as well as many offerings from the local Amish community.

The approach to Dover Air Force Base is a lot like the approach to most bases: an abundance of fast-food joints, strip malls and budget hotels that alternate with stunning regularity on a prairie flat highway.

A few miles from the far edge of the commercial strip, the first hints that this historic community in Delaware shares its borders with the Air Force begin to emerge. The highway signs come first — trucks headed for the base are ordered to go one way, visitors the other — and a pair of water towers slash at the horizon.

In the middle distance, a massive C-5 transport plane, so big and ungainly that it looks like an elephant with wings, lurches into the gray sky. As it leaves, it emits a throaty roar.

The locals call this, "the sound of freedom."

But amidst the cacophony, a quiet honor is being bestowed at the same time. It happens at the mortuary on the base, day and night for our fallen heroes.

The people stationed at Dover quickly learn this is a place centered in the national consciousness. But for many different reasons.

**A city on the edge**  
Twenty-two-year-old Sharita Wash-

ington had her pick of three bases when she returned from a tour in Japan a year ago. She admits she didn't know much about Delaware then. But after a bit of research and a few phone calls, the senior airman knew Dover was for her.

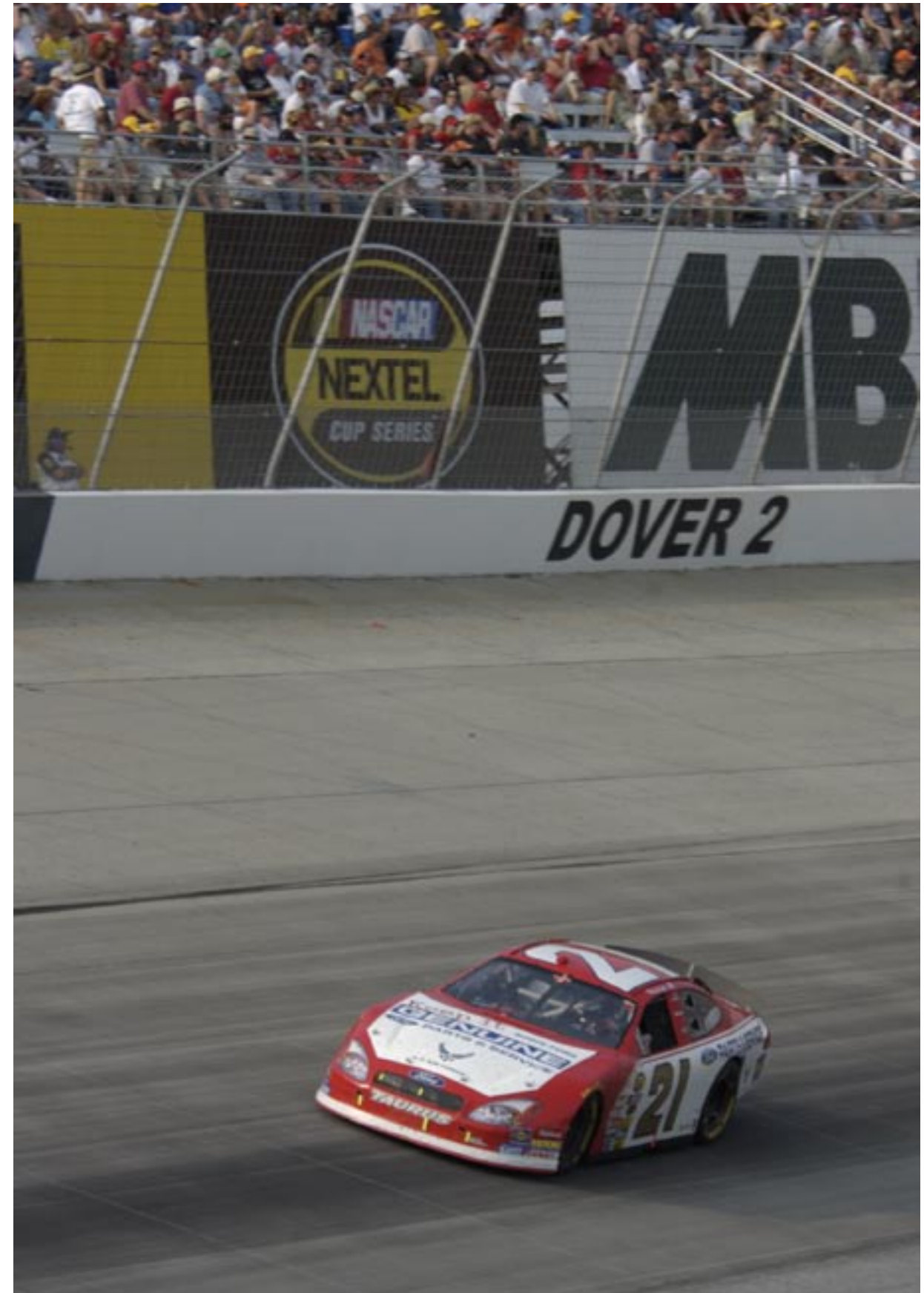
"I like to venture a lot, so location was everything," the Houston native said. "I've gotten to see so much more being here."

Since Delaware is only 96 miles long and 35 miles wide, it only takes about two hours to travel north to south through this "Small Wonder" of a state, or into another state. Less than two hours west is Washington, D.C., and northeast, Philadelphia. New York City is less than three hours away. Airman Washington has breezed through them all, some even twice.

But for those who don't need to "venture" for adventure and prefer a smaller community to city life, Dover is still the place to be.

Senior Master Sgt. Shawn Rickey moved to Dover just six months ago with his wife, Tracey, and 13-year-old daughter, Morgan. They were looking to be closer to family and to be in an area that would give them a little of everything.

"There's no sales tax here, a very low crime rate, the schools are good,



**Driver Ricky Rudd pilots his #21 car,** sponsored by the U.S. Air Force, during a NASCAR race at Dover International Speedway on Dover Downs. The speedway, located near the base, is a popular entertainment complex which draws many military members and their families from surrounding areas.





and we're close to the beach," said Sergeant Rickey, noncommissioned officer in charge of the public health flight. "Plus we get the small-town life in a centrally-located city. What else do you need?"

### In a 'Galaxy' all its own

Dover AFB – born 10 days after Pearl Harbor was bombed in 1941 – isn't

**Senior Airman Sharita Washington takes advantage of some down time** to peruse the vendor booths at Spence's Bizarre close to downtown Dover. The maintenance analyst from Houston chose Dover as her follow-on assignment from Japan.



the biggest in America by any means. It has far less the workforce of Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland, for example, where about 13,000 military and civilian workers live and work each day.

But Dover is big in other ways.

It's responsible for about one-quarter of the nation's military airlift cargo, a task it addresses with the largest cargo plane in the Air Force — the C-5 Galaxy. It has the nation's largest and busiest aerial port — where half of the 10,000-plus tons of cargo a month is in direct support of the global war on terrorism, base officials say — and the U.S. military's largest mortuary.

### Preserving air mobility's past

The base has one of the best kept secrets in the Air Force. It's Delaware's second largest tourist draw. It's listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It's the Air Mobility Command Museum.

Housed inside and outside a World War II han-

gar on one end of the runway where secret rockets were developed for the war is a collection of classic planes — a feisty P-51 Mustang, a B-17 Flying Fortress adorned with a morale-boosting pinup, and a C-47 Skytrain (a.k.a. Gooney Bird) that earned its stripes on D-Day, among more than 28 aircraft.

The museum houses a growing collection of vintage planes, artifacts and exhibits that reflect the evolution and history of Air Mobility Command and of the varied missions of Dover AFB since its beginnings in 1941. It's the only museum in the world dedicated solely to airlift and air refueling.

The museum began in 1986 with the C-47 that was rejected as "beyond salvage" by other museums. Today, this museum boasts eight fully restored aircraft on display inside, 16 aircraft parked outside, and four more still being restored.

"We try to bring to light parts of history people don't know," said Mike Leister, museum director. "We have interactive exhibits that help tell the story of the people in AMC, and we're the only museum that allows tours inside some of our aircraft."

As Mr. Leister said, this is interesting even if you're not an aircraft buff.

And that, for many stationed at Dover, pretty much sums up what it's like to live in the "Small Wonder" state. 🦋



### The Air Mobility Command Museum at Dover

boasts over 20,000 square feet of inside aircraft display and exhibit space, plus an outside Commemoration park, and an airpark featuring large airlifters. The museum staff and volunteers are dedicated to preserving and displaying the material history of AMC and Dover. The museum hosts an average of 150 active duty retirement ceremonies annually.

### Get more details

Want more information about Dover. See [www.cityofdover.com](http://www.cityofdover.com); [www.dover.af.mil](http://www.dover.af.mil); [www.af-crossroads.com](http://www.af-crossroads.com); [www.amcmuseum.org](http://www.amcmuseum.org).

## Dover at a Glance

**Mission:** Home of the 436th Airlift "Eagle" Wing and the 512th Airlift "Liberty" Reserve Wing, which together provide a quarter of the Air Force's global airlift capability by flying C-5 Galaxies. The wing's mission is to "provide worldwide movement of outsized cargo and personnel on scheduled, special assignment, exercise and contingency airlift missions." Additionally, the wings operate the largest and busiest aerial port in the Department of Defense and the only joint services mortuary in the United States.

**Location:** Dover is in the "First State" of Delaware and is at the

center of the Delmarva (Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia) peninsula. The base is located two miles south of Dover — the capital of Delaware. The state is 96 miles long and 35 miles wide; therefore, you can travel from north to south in only two hours. Delaware's location allows easy access to the major metropolitan areas of the Northeast with both Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., just an hour and a half away. New York City is less than three hours away.

**Getting around:** By air: There's no major commercial airport directly serving Dover, but two international airports are just 70 miles away: Philadelphia and Baltimore-Washington International. By road: Dover's main

highways are U.S.-13, which is a six-lane thoroughfare in town and then controlled-access to the north, and DE-1, which is a limited-access tollway (50 cents) around the town. Traffic is usually light compared to major cities. **Population:** Dover: About 34,000. Dover AFB: About 4,200 active duty; 2,100 reserve and Air National Guard members, and 970 civilians.

**History:** Dover is a town of strong historic interest which was laid out by William Penn in 1683. It became the capital in 1777. In the years immediately following World War II, Dover acquired land for construction of an airport. This land was developed and activated during World War II as Dover Army Air Field and was used

as a coastal patrol station equipped with O-478 aircraft. In early 1942, the airfield expanded to accommodate the B-25 "Mitchell" medium bombers. The base also became the site of secret development of air-launched rockets. The base was deactivated in 1946 and was used periodically for training exercises until its reactivation in July 1950 as Dover AFB.

**Climate:** The Chesapeake and Delaware Bays moderate Delaware's climate. The state experiences four distinct seasons. Winter can be bitterly cold. Highs during this season average near freezing with low temperatures near 0 degrees Fahrenheit. Spring comes to this region in mid to late March. This is a pleasant time to visit

with moderate temperatures and low humidity. Summer brings temperatures ranging from 80 to 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Humidity is highest inland with ocean breezes cooling the shoreline. Fall brings cooler temperatures and low humidity. The forested regions often have brilliant foliage displays. **Cost of living:** Many of the costs are far below those in neighboring states. Housing, for example, is 11 percent lower than the national average. There's also no sales tax in Delaware. **Education:** Good public schools with seven institutions of higher education. **Recreation:** Visitors to central Delaware will find museums, historic sites, performing arts, scenic towns, fishing facilities, golfing opportunities, guide

services and several public lands where bird-watching, camping and nature activities reign. And for the sports enthusiasts, situated within two miles of the base is the 140,000-seat Dover International Speedway, famous for its twice a year NASCAR Winston Cup races (in June and September). The big draw: hyperkinetic action on the 24-degree banked track they call "The Monster Mile." Outside race weeks, Dover Downs is a prime specimen of what the "gaming" industry calls "racinos" (horse racing and casino). From November through April, harness races take place on a much smaller track set within the Monster Mile.